

***Student Engagement Task Force***  
***Preliminary Report***  
***December 19, 2007***

## ***Student Engagement Task Force***

### ***Preliminary Report***

When looking at or discussing the area of ***student engagement***, there are a number of complex factors and components that need to be taken into consideration. The 2007 NSSE, (National Survey of Student Engagement) has found that the highest impact practices for colleges and universities are: “first year seminars, learning communities, service learning, undergraduate research, study abroad, and other experiences with diversity, internships, and capstone courses and projects.” With this information in mind Case Western Reserve University has in some ways attempted to put in place some of the components that have been recognized nationally as key elements that support student engagement. Our new SAGES program; The Case Way, our new developmental undergraduate experience model; our focus on student activities and leadership; community engagement and experiential learning; our reinvestment in athletics; Greek life; Undergraduate Admission’s efforts; strong support for Undergraduate Student Government; and the University Program Board--all have been identified as positive efforts supporting student engagement.

According to our own *2006 First Destination Survey*, 79% of our respondents took part in some form of experiential learning, 94% who did so participated in more than one opportunity, and nearly half (49%) took part in five or more experiential learning opportunities. Eighty-four percent (84%) of our students who reported continuing on to graduate school participated in some form of research with a faculty member, and (80%) of students who reported being employed had participated in a co-op, internship, or practicum. From these statistics it seems like we are at least moving in the right direction.

On the other hand, areas that have been identified as needing improvement are: the need for more effective student academic advising; stronger student mentoring; more faculty participating in both in class and out of class interactions; helping students feel more valued and important; developing a more inclusive curriculum; more opportunities and encouragement allowing for junior year abroad; and creating a more welcoming environment for students based on cultural inclusion. There are also concerns that undergraduate students may have too much in their curriculum to be able to fully engage the academic experience both in and outside the classroom. This may also stem from the fact that many outside student experiences are not fused into the academic curriculum and thus not given academic credit. Many of these additional student engagement activities are seen as extra when they should more effectively be a

requirement. All of these, in many ways, connect with and can be collaboratively enhanced by the other nine task force areas now being evaluated.

### ***Graduate/Professional Students***

When our Student Engagement Task Force focused on graduate and professional students, many of the same things that we found necessary to support the most effective undergraduate student engagement opportunities also pertain to the needs of our graduate/professional students. In all areas, Student Affairs seems to play a major role in student engagement. In our own *Self Study for Reaccreditation*, we acknowledge the importance of educating the whole person. Things such as financial support, faculty mentoring/advising, and student diversity influence the graduate/professional experience. We also have stated that in order to provide our graduate/professional student with a more effective learning experience, we should be:

- a. “Exploring possible administrative changes that would facilitate research and graduate programs throughout the university
- b. Examining current levels of infrastructure and recommending an infrastructure needed to effect significant improvements in research and the graduate programs
- c. Exploring other mechanisms that could be implemented to encourage faculty in their research and support of graduate students, including changes in tuition policies, graduate student stipends, and other academic and financial strategies
- d. Recommending how to increase the number and improve the quality of students enrolling in graduate study, and also ways to improve their research experiences while at Case”

All of these things, we have currently stated, but have yet to develop and effectively put in place. It is good that we have taken the time and effort to understand some of the areas we need to enhance, but now it is time to create an implementation strategy.

Other areas our task force has found that need further attention pertaining to a more positive level of student engagement for our graduate/professional students are things such as;

- a. Creating a base line model for graduate/professional students for all levels of support and development

b. A consistent commitment from the Board of Trustees, President, and senior administration recognizing the importance of and need for improving areas that are lacking in student engagement efforts

c. Implementing a University wide cultural shift where faculty teaching efforts, mentoring, and their roles in the professional development of their students is attached to tenure, where accountability standards are put in place and adhered to

d. Establish an ongoing commitment from administrative leadership to a cultural shift in prioritizing better relationships between graduate/professional students and their advisors

e. Have faculty leaders set examples for their peers of best practices in mentoring while finding a way to reward them for their efforts (Possibly using UCITE from a faculty development perspective)

f. Do an assessment of what graduate/professional students feel can best support their efforts and investigate how to put these practices into effect

## **Summary**

The Student Engagement Task Force recognizes that in some areas Case Western Reserve University has made many advances in both undergraduate and graduate/professional student engagement efforts. We feel it is important for Case to act on much of the data it has already collected on how many of these efforts can be enhanced. Much of the aforementioned hard work has paid off, but there is still much to be done. If Case truly desires to rise above the level of its perceived peers to create its own globally recognized Research University identity, it will need to do more than just what everyone else is doing. CWRU will need to have our students, faculty, staff, and alumni, telling the world how special we are. We will have to decide if enhancing the student experience should be one of the main strategies the University actively pursues (and invests in) over the next 5-10 years, and if so can we clearly articulate why the "benefits" of this cultural shift outweigh the "costs".

## **Attachments**

We have attached two documents to this *Student Engagement Task Force Preliminary Report*.

1. *The Case Way* (Undergraduate Experience Model)

2. *The Graduate/Professional Student Experience Committee Report*

# THE CASE WAY

*A snap shot of the Undergraduate Experience*

Class Year	Class Themes	Campus Living	SAGES	Class Events/ Initiatives	A Case Graduate
1st	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Transitions</li> <li>•Foundations</li> <li>•Connection</li> </ul>	Residential College	First Seminar	Summer Orientation Common Reading The Little Blue Book Emerging Leaders	<b>Lifelong Scholar</b>  ●  <b>Active Global Citizen</b>  ●  <b>Ethical Leader</b>
2nd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Exploration</li> <li>•Engagement</li> <li>•Personal Vision</li> </ul>	Greek Special Interest Housing Suite/DbI/SS	University Seminar	Second Year Institute  Second Year Celebration	
Upper-Class Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Focused Exper.</li> <li>•Application</li> <li>•Future Prep.</li> </ul>	Village at 115 Greek Special Interest Housing	Departmental Seminar	"Coming of Age" Birthday Card	
Graduating Seniors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Reflection</li> <li>•Transition</li> <li>•Connections</li> <li>•Celebrations</li> </ul>	Suite/DbI/SS Off-campus	Senior Capstone	Life Skills Book "Senior's Salute" Senior Week	

## **The Graduate/Professional Student Experience Committee**

### ***Introduction***

In 2004, Glenn Nicholls charged the graduate/professional student cohort committee with the following:

- Determine the extent to which Student Affairs departments provide services for graduate/professional school students
- Determine if additional funding/resources are needed to support these efforts
- Determine if collaboration and increased communication among the Student Affairs departments would be useful in delivering these services
- Determine way in which to publicize Student Affairs efforts with graduate/professional student services

The original co-chairs of the committee, Judith Olson-Fallon (ESS) and Heidi McCormick (Career Center), worked with the committee, comprised of members from Student Affairs and Student services offices from the schools. In 2005, Heidi McCormick stepped down as co-chair, and Denise Douglas was asked to co-chair with Judith Olson-Fallon.

### ***The Work of the Committee:***

In 2005, the committee renamed itself the Graduate/Professional Student Experience Committee and began the work of defining the Case graduate/professional student experience through discussion and the eventual creation of a model. In addition to the initial charge from Glenn Nicholls, the committee also reviewed the Accreditation Subcommittee report on graduate and professional student development. Some of the recommendations of the subcommittee are as follows:

- Define more specifically what is unique and distinctive about the “transformative Case experience” that cuts across graduate and professional programs and create mechanisms to insure that students have ample opportunities to integrate this unique perspective into their intellectual, professional and personal development.

- Regularly obtain more comprehensive and comparative information on the academic, professional and personal development of graduate and professional students at Case to provide a better basis for analyzing and enhancing the development of students.
- Create opportunities for faculty to develop their mentoring skills, incentives for mentoring their students, and mechanisms for accountability.

The committee members have focused on sharing their observations and/or concerns about graduate and professional students as well as on determining how various departments might collaborate on social activities, particularly orientation events. For instance, for the past two years, the committee has sponsored a campus-wide barbecue, an orientation information fair, a night at the Jake, and a project for the campus volunteer day. Committee members have contributed their available time, talents, and financial contributions to fund these various events.

The committee is currently looking for pre-existing events/traditions to *piggy back* onto in order to provide opportunities for graduate and professional students to have a stronger sense of their campus community and to engage in professional development activities beyond their departments.

Student Entering Graduate/Professional School

